

Playing the Odds

Nighttime driving increases chances of accidents

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Many people dislike working at night, and the reason is usually simple. It can be harder to function at night than it is in the daytime.

Darkness can make driving to and from work a challenging job. It can be dangerous, too. According to the National Safety Council, fatal vehicle accidents increase sharply during the hours of darkness. In fact, statistics show chances of being involved in some type of accident are about three times greater at night than during daylight hours.

There are things to do, facts to know and techniques to use that can be used to reduce the chance of a mishap and ensure safe nighttime operations.

Safety officials recommend the following tips to make trips to and from night-shift safer.

- Before leaving work centers or home, make sure vehicle headlights, taillights, and directional signals are operational.
- Keep an operational flashlight and reflective belt attached to an outermost garment.
- Make sure headlights and windshields are clean both inside and outside.
- When driving at night, use extreme caution because even familiar surroundings may seem different.
- Wait 5 minutes before driving after leaving a lighted building, it takes a few minutes for eyes to adjust to the dark.
- Do not wear any kind of sunglasses at night; there are no glasses designed to reduce headlight glare at night; any lens that reduces the brightness of headlights also reduces the light reflected from dimly-lit objects at the side of the road, particularly pedestrians.
- When following another vehicle at night, keep low beams on so the other driver will not be blinded.
- Switch lights from high to low beams when an oncoming vehicle is about 500 feet away; also, when behind another vehicle use low beams within 300 feet of that car's rear.
- Limited vision at night reduces the amount of stopping time when trouble is spotted; reduce speed accordingly.
- Look ahead into the areas that are only faintly illuminated; the faint glow of a distant headlight or some movement may be an early alert to a possible hazard.
- Never stop on any roadway at night; it is hard for an approaching driver to tell whether or not a stopped car is moving until it's too late.
- Take curves slower at night; headlights point straight ahead and shine off the road which reduces the view of the road considerably.
- Switch to low beams in fog or snow; high beams will reflect more off fog and snow.
- Last, and most importantly, never drink and drive. Besides the obvious reasons, alcohol can drastically slow the direct affect of the eye's sensitivity.

Nighttime driving is risky. In one year alone, there were more than 2 million nighttime collisions in the United States. Of those, more than 18,000 were fatal. While teenagers fare especially poorly at night, more than half of all their motor vehicle deaths occurring between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m., older individuals are also at risk. For every 15 years of life, the amount of light admitted to the eye is cut by as much as half. That means that the average 60 year old needs three times as much light at night as the average 20 year old. Therefore, it is especially important to understand the dangers of nighttime driving, so that you can properly assess the risk and arrive at your destination safely. ➔